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The HISTORY *and* CARE OF TAPESTRY

EUGENE *and* PAUL BERNAT

"THE CREED" FLEMISH TAPESTRY OF THE XV CENTURY IN THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON

The History and Care of Tapestry

By

Eugene and Paul Bernat

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Preface

THIS booklet is presented with the hope that it will prove to be of service as well as of interest to our present clientele. To those as yet unacquainted with our work, we trust that it will serve as a favorable introduction.

In the following pages, we have endeavored to give the reader a short outline of the history of tapestry; the dangers which must be guarded against in their preservation; and the methods which should be employed in the care of tapestries.

Our sincere thanks are due to the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston in permitting us to use photographs of several tapestries in their magnificent collection, and to Miss Sarah G. Flint, Adviser to the Textile Department of the Boston Museum, for her kind assistance and helpful information.

—Emile Bernat.

"THE TRIUMPH OF PEACE"
FLEMISH TAPESTRY OF THE XVII CENTURY, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS OF BOSTON

History of Tapestry

Many forms of the weaver's art have been called tapestry, but the true form of tapestry-weaving is a fabric formed of weft threads inserted by hand, and passed alternately in and out of the parallel strings of a warp stretched upon a frame or loom. These threads are not completely thrown across the loom, but are introduced to cover short spaces with various colors as required by the design; and, as they are pressed tightly together, they hide the warp, which forms no part of the design of the finished tapestry.

The art of tapestry-weaving falls into main epochs, ancient and modern. As early as 1400 B. C. the art was practised in Egypt. The Museum of Fine Arts of Boston has a great number of fragments of Egyptian or Coptic tapestry dating from the first centuries of the Christian era, among which two are especially deserving of mention. They are each less than a foot square, and are of a very fine and beautiful weave. The principal figure in each is a rabbit, which is drawn with a remarkable feeling for nature. From the Nile the art of tapestry-weaving extended to Europe, especially to Greece and Rome, where it reached a high stage of development. The decline attendant upon the fall of Rome caused a decline of tapestry-weaving.

After an interval of almost a thousand years, we find it flourishing again as a fine art in the great Flemish and French cities of the thirteenth century. From these countries weavers went, at the invitations of rulers and nobles, to Germany, Italy, England, Sweden, Spain, and Russia.

The city of Arras was the centre of the industry in Flanders in its early days and for a long time tapestries took their name from this city and became known as arras. Shakespeare often refers to arras in his writings as in the scene where Hamlet finds Polonius behind the arras. Brussels succeeded Arras as the chief tapestry-weaving centre of Europe after the taking and sacking of the latter city by Louis XI in 1477. Although tapestries became very popular in Europe and looms were set up in numerous places, the city of Brussels maintained its supremacy till the middle of the seventeenth century, producing some of the finest pieces of tapestry in existence.

The earliest Gothic tapestries that have come down to us are long and narrow; the various incidents of the story thus treated, are arranged side by side and all are of equal importance. The figures are all upon one plane; there is no attempt at elaboration of decorative details; the designer telling his story simply, so that the most ignorant could understand it.

In the second half of the 15th century, tapestries became larger; the important incident of the story to be told was usually placed in the middle with the less important arranged on each side of it and separated by horizontal and vertical architectural motives. The figures were placed in groups and those in the background were put one above the other. There was more elaboration of details in costumes, architecture, and landscape. the scattered flowers of the earlier pieces were arranged to closely cover the ground and were rendered with few colors and little or no shading, but with great accuracy, truth, and decorative feeling. The landscapes, architecture, figures, costumes, manners, and customs were those with which the designer was familiar in his own town. Narrow borders of flowering vines, sprays of flowers tied with ribbons, and architectural motives framed the field.

About 1500, Flemish artists visited Italy, and the effect of these Italian journeys is seen in the figures, faces, costumes, and landscapes, as well as in the colors of many of the tapestries made at that time. In the early years of 1500, Flemish tapestries were much prized at home and abroad.

In 1515 a new era of tapestry began; the designs were no longer made exclusively by Flemish artists, whose work was essentially decorative, but commissions for designs were given to great Italian frescoe and easel painters like Raphael and Guilo Romano. These artists used fewer figures, little drapery, and introduced perspective. The artists themselves unually only made small sketches, their pupils enlarging them to the size of the tapestries and often even overseeing the weavers. The designs became more and more pictorial, dramatic, and self-conscious, losing the naive charm of the earlier pieces, as well as their value as illustrations of the manners, customs, and costumes of their day. The subjects chosen were usually historical, mythological, or Biblical—much white and light colored silks were used for highlights and in the backgrounds of receding hills. The armour was taken from the Roman statues, and the Biblical or mythological characters wore draperies and costumes that were neither Oriental nor European, but the artist's idea of the former. The borders increased in width and consisted of closely bunched fruits and flowers, interspersed with cartouches and containing small scenes, figures of the Gods and Godesses, cherubs, birds, and animals. The weaver's guild of Brussels enjoyed an almost complete monopoly of the industry; and jealous of their reputation, caused a law to be passed in 1528, obliging all tapestries made in that town to bear the mark of a shield flanked with two B's (Brussels and Brabant). This period, the most prosperous, though not the most artistic in the history of Flemish tapestry-weaving, came to an end in the second

half of the 17th century, when chicanery and fraud were often practised to make up for the absence of real art, and the lack of skill of the weavers.

A very valuable collection of Flemish Tapestries is owned by the Museum of Fine Arts of Boston. The Golden Age of Tapestry-weaving is represented by the large Gothic tapestry "The Creed" and "Moses Crossing The Red Sea," in which is seen the transition between the Gothic and the Renaissance. "The Conference," which bears the Brussels mark, is typical of the full Renaissance and "The Triumph of Peace," made in the latter part of the seventeenth century, shows the effect of the popularization of the industry and the influence of the French artists of Louis XIV's court.

During the last half of the 17th century, the demand for tapestries became unusually large; but the great cost of the Renaissance tapestries put them beyond the reach of many. To reduce this cost, the weavers were forced to simplify their work by using a coarser weave and materials, simpler designs, fewer colors, and to substitute foliage and landscape for figures. They also dimished the size of tapestries so as to fit the homes of the people. These tapestries, although simple in design and color, are, nevertheless, very decorative and appropriate for both city and country houses. Since they are easily cut, they can be found in a great variety of sizes.

The great increase in production and consequent commercialization brought with it inevitable decline. Borders, which are an essential component of all good tapestry design, were often omitted or relegated to an unimportant position, having no vital connection with the panels. The borders that were made were usually of a scroll type, or of a floral type with vases in the vertical sections. Two types of design, which had played an unimportant part up to this period, came into widespread use; hunting scenes and verdures, distinguished by birds scattered about in the foreground and in the trees, and massed foliage woven partly in light colored silks to portray sunshine. The great increase in demand also brought about great duplication of stock designs, so that one may find several tapestries of identical design, yet of greatly varying quality according to the purse of the customer and the skill of the weaver. Tenier's paintings became popular models for designers of tapestries during this period, and thus peasant scenes were made fashionable.

Tapestry-weaving began as early as 1025 in France but only with the decline of the Flemish looms, did the French weavers come into prominence and produce fine tapestries. In the 14th and 15th centuries, many fine pieces were woven in Paris and Burgundy, and the Dukes of Burgundy were great patrons of the

FLEMISH TAPESTRY BEFORE REPAIRING.

SAME, AFTER BEING REPAIRED AT THE WORKSHOP OF EMILE BERNAT.

industry. We have records of many magnificent tapestries, but as most of them have been destroyed, the few that remain are very rare and highly prized. Factories were also established in other parts of France, where less elaborate pieces were woven with Gothic traditions of composition and colors, but with Renaissance details. At this time in France were made those verdures known as "Fleurettes" or "Mille Fleur," the dark blue backgrounds of which are closely covered with flowering plants and animals. The Boston Museum has a number of pieces from this period, which, both from design and color, are considered masterpieces of French pre-Renaissance work. As these tapestries have been hung together with Flemish tapestries of the same period and type, we are able to form a clear idea as to the similarity and difference of the work of these two nations.

At the beginning of the Renaissance period, very little weaving was done in France; but during the reign of Henry IV (1589-1610), the industry was revived, for Henry established several factories, and imported Flemish weavers and designers. Under Louis XIV (1643-1715) the Paris factories were combined; and, under the direction of Lebrun, many wonderful tapestries of intricate design and rich coloring were produced. In magnificence of design and workmanship, the creations of Lebrun, are probably without equal in the whole field of tapestry. Up to this time, the factories at Aubusson and Beauvais had been unimportant, the looms at Aubusson making verdures of inferior quality and similar to those of Flanders; but Louis aided them in many ways; first by incorporating Beauvais as a Royal factory and secondly by giving both numerous contracts and by providing them with experienced workmen.

Under Louis XV (1715-1774) the art underwent a great change. The tapestries that were made were still very beautiful. They were of a very fine weave, made almost entirely of silk, with hundreds and even thousands of shades. The designs were made by the best painters of the time including Boucher, Oudry, and Lemoine. They imitated nature so closely, that one hardly believes the figures are inanimate and woven. Yet there is something lacking in them. The deisgns are small and artificial, lacking the simplicity and harmony of the Gothic and early Renaissance work. Tapestry-weaving is an individual art, and when the method and style of the painter are introduced, the result is inevitably a failure.

The French Revolution closed all the factories, and many tapestries were destroyed by the inflamed people, who considered them profane because of their richness as well as to obtain the gold they often contained, burning them together with the other property of the nobles. During the last century, the in-

dustry has been revived at the Gobelins, which is incorporated as a government factory; and at Beauvais and Aubusson; but much of their best work has been copies of the 18th century pieces.

Very little tapestry-weaving has been done in England. Charles I had cartoons prepared by Vandyke and other great artists, from which beautiful tapestries were woven at the Mortlake looms. Weavers were imported from Flanders to do the work; and, therefore, the tapestries compare favorably with the work of France and Flanders. During the life of Charles, the factory prospered, and produced many excellent tapestries; but soon after his death it failed, and in spite of several attempts has never been re-opened.

In the 19th century, William Morris started a factory at Merton Abbey in the style of a pre-Renaissance establishment, with Sir Edward Burne-Jones as designer, but nothing extensive has been accomplished. In 1876, Prince Leopold and several English noblemen established a tapestry factory known as the "Royal Windsor Tapestry Works;" but because of the enormous prices charged and the inability of the management to put the looms on a self-supporting basis, the noble patrons ceased their support and the factory soon closed without accomplishing anything of importance.

In Italy the production was small. At various times Church dignitaries and nobelmen established factories under the direction of Flemish weavers as the Karcher brothers, and exceedingly good work was turned out, but the production was limited, and the pieces are rare outside of Italy. The tapestry, "The Assumption of The Virgin," in the Boston Museum, is an excellent example of the work of the Italian looms. This tapestry is on permanent exhibition through the kindness of the Boston Athenaeum.

Other countries, also, had tapestry factories for longer or shorter periods, but nowhere did the industry reach anything like the proportions it did in France and Flanders.

The collection of tapestries made in the Royal Spanish Factory, which through the kindness of His Majesty King Alfonso was exhibited in New York, Boston, and other large cities of the country, gave tapestry-lovers the opportunity to judge for themselves the work of that country.

A number of years ago, a factory for the manufacture of new tapestries was started in this country by Mr. William Baumgarten, who imported weavers from Aubusson; and since then other factories have been established. The progress in these factories is slow, however, because of labor conditions, lack of proper materials, and the great quantity of antique tapestries in this country.

However, as the demand continues to grow, and as the supply of old tapestries

"THE CONFERENCE."
BRUSSELS TAPESTRY OF THE XVI CENTURY, MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS OF BOSTON

is bound to diminish, tapestry-weavers and manufacturers of materials will surely expand their operations; so that we may confidently look forward to this country becoming the centre of the industry. Yet, for the moment, the main effort should be directed toward the preservation of old tapestries. This work has been brought to a high state of development, so that today, an expert repairer can restore a tapestry that is in pieces to a stage of comparative excellence. The accompanying photographs of tapestries recently repaired by Mr. Emile Bernat indicate what can be done in this direction. Only an expert tapestry repairer can be expected to do such work. Good repairing considerably enhances the value of a tapestry, but poor repairing is not only time wasted, but the tapestry is worth less than it was before it was touched by the poor repairer.

The Museum of Fine Arts of Boston has greatly furthered the interest of the public in tapestries by forming one of the finest collections in the country, by lectures on the subject, and by the assistance it gives all students of the art. Mr. Emile Bernat takes this opportunity to express his personal indebtedness to the Museum for giving him work when he first came to Boston and for its continued patronage and encouragement.

The Care of Tapestries

Tapestries, because of their age and frailty, require constant and careful attention. Many things threaten the existence of tapestries; such as moisture, sun, improper hanging, handling, and moths. Neglect to have necessary repairs made in time is the cause of much destruction. Many people, after paying thousands of dollars for fine tapestries, leave them either entirely without attention, or in the care of the inexperienced. Thus the various destructive agencies are constantly working until the tapestries are often reduced to such a condition that they almost fall apart on the wall. In this, as in other matters, it is cheaper in the end to employ an expert than an ignorant unskilled worker.

Moisture or dampness has a very distinct and important effect upon tapestries. If a tapestry is left in a moist atmosphere for a long time, the wool and silk fibres gradually rot away just as any article of clothing would under the same conditions. Furthermore, moisture has the added effect of aiding in the spread of moths, which attack tapestries as they are composed almost entirely of wool. A good circulation of clean, dry air about tapestries is very much to be desired, as this preserves the vitality of the fibres. If tapestries are constantly exposed to the sun the fibres are burned, producing serious breaks in the pieces.

Improper hanging and lining is very apt to cause serious damage to tapestries. All the weight of a piece is concentrated on the few rings or hooks on which it is hung. If these hooks or rings are attached directly to the tapestry or to an incorrectly made lining, the whole weight comes on a few points which gradually weaken and eventually rip. Another less frequent but more harmful practise is that of nailing or tacking a tapestry to the wall. This invariably results in severe damage to the tapestry, as the points where the greatest strain comes, are weakened by the holes made by the tacks or nails. Again, improper hanging tends to pull the tapestry out of shape and causes it to lose much of its beauty and charm. If the lining is properly made, however, and enough hooks or rings are used, the weight of the piece is evenly distributed over its entire surface, and so no one place bears more than it can safely support. Tapestries should always be hung as high as possible, especially if furniture is to be placed in front of them, as the dark hidden recesses and covered places are ideal breeding places for moths. It has been Mr. Bernat's experience that wherever large pieces of furniture were placed in front of tapestries, most of the repairing was required in the parts thus covered.

Cleanliness is one of the most important factors in the preservation of tapes-

tries; but great care must be used in securing it. By far the best method is dry cleansing with stale bread or gentle beating. If dry cleaning is not sufficient, the tapestries should be freed from dirt by careful brushing, and then they should be washed in soft, moderately warm water. They should never be boiled or put into a washing drum as that is almost certain to ruin them. Naptha is also very harmful as it dissolves the natural preservative oils in the wool and silk, and leaves tapestries hard and brittle. In fact, cleansing of any sort, should always be done by a reliable tapestry expert as the relative cost is so little, and the danger of harming the tapestries so great if the cleansing is attemped by inexperienced and irresponsible persons.

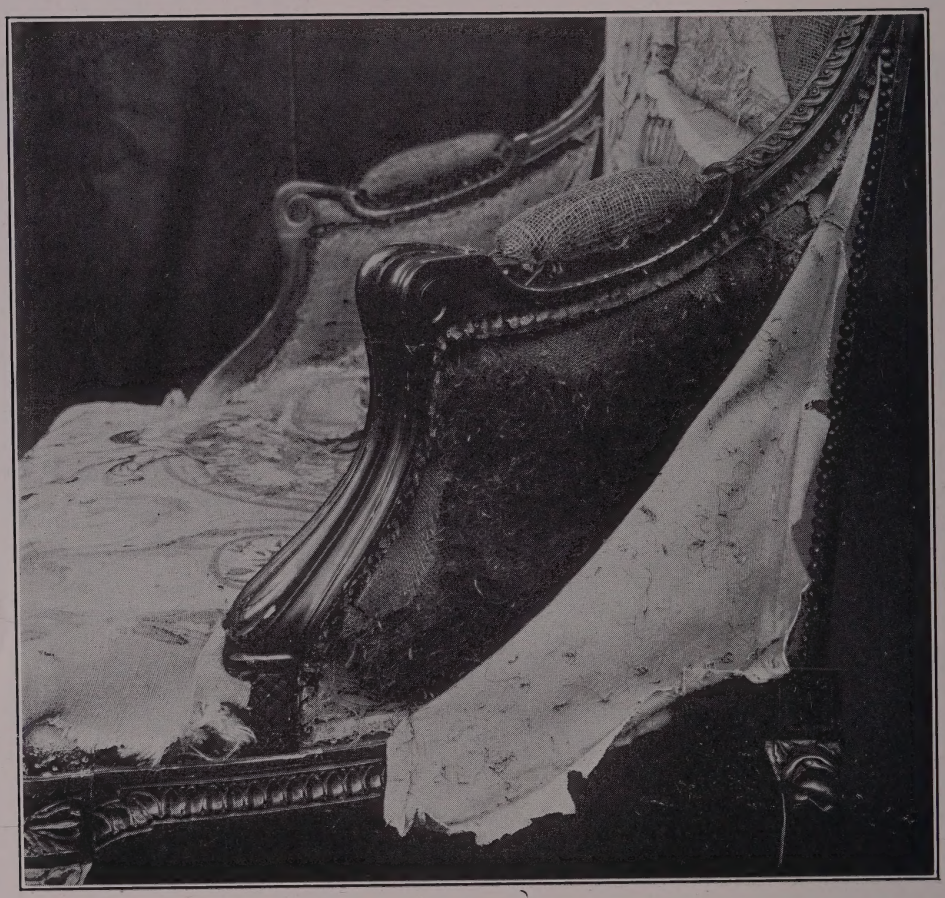
Two principal species of insects infest furniture, rugs, and tapestries—the carpet beetle or buffalo bug, and the true clothes moth. In this country, the carpet beetle was quite common twenty or thirty years ago; but, according to C. V. Riley, United States entomologist, seems to be gradually becoming extinct because of the substitution of hard wood floors and movable rugs for the old style of soft pine floors and carpets. It is yet by no means extinct, however, and a description of its appearance and habits might be useful.

The carpet beetle is a European species, but it never became a dangerous house pest there, as carpets are rare in European countries. In this country, when carpets were almost universally used, the pest had an opportunity to breed unmolested from one end of the year to the other. This insect is likely to infest carpets, all woolen goods, and furs that lie undisturbed for any length of time. It may be found most frequently in the larva stage, which is also its feeding stage. The larva is from a quarter to five-sixteenths of an inch long, brown in color, and clothed with stiff brown hairs which are longer on the sides and extremities, the hinder end being furnished with three tufts of long hair and the head with a dense bunch of shorter hair. The pupa or quiescent state between the larva and the beetle, is very seldom seen, as it is formed within the last partly split skin of the larva; and, therefore, requires no description. The beetle is three-sixteenths of an inch long, nearly as broad, and, in form, broadly elliptical. Its back is black with three wide, irregular, lateral, white stripes and a red streak running down the middle of its back, which broadens out at intervals to meet the lateral stripes. When disturbed it draws in its legs and feigns death.

The beetles begin to appear in the fall and continue to issue through the winter and spring. They quickly mate and the females usually lay their eggs upon the carpet or other textiles that they select; or, less frequently, in the cracks of floors. With favorable temperature, the eggs soon hatch and the larvae grow rapidly, molting six or more times. When full grown, the larvae seek to conceal themselves

TAPESTRY AFTER BEING DAMAGED BY MOTHS

SAME AFTER BEING REPAIRED AT THE WORKROOMS OF MR. EMILE BERNAT.



LOUIS XVI TAPESTRY CHAIR INFESTED WITH MOTHS

in some convenient shelter and there go through the pupa stage and again become beetles.

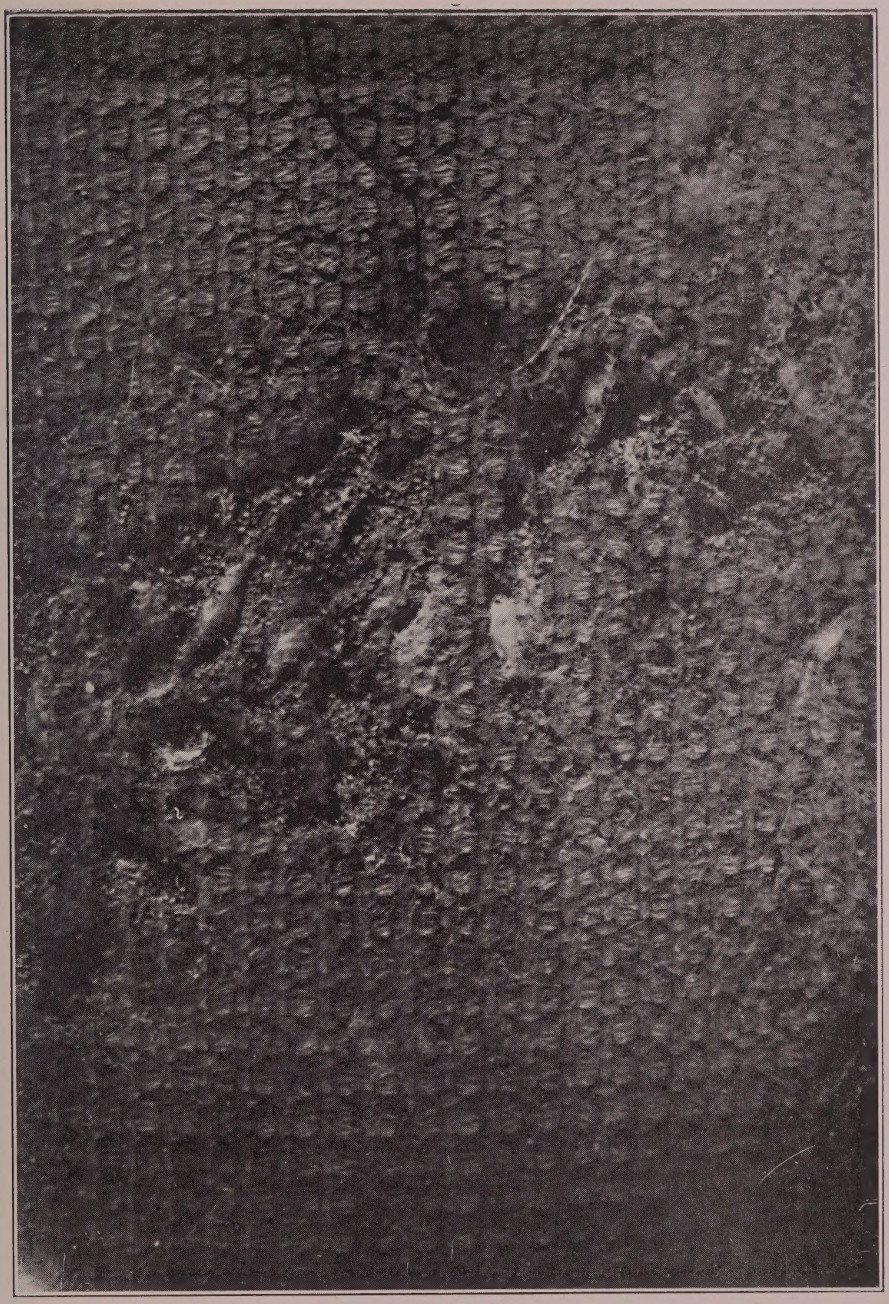
The true clothes moths are becoming an ever more serious menace to our furniture and clothing. While the ravages of the buffalo bug are decreasing, the damage done by the moths is increasing every year. They attack and infest animal fibres in places where the beetles are never found; namely, the upholstering of chairs, tapestries hanging on the walls, etc. As these little pests are not being automatically exterminated as are the carpet beetles, special efforts must be made to destroy them, or their continued spread means destruction to many valuable works of art.

Three species of these moths are especially common in all parts of our country, known to science as the *Tinea Pellionella Linn*, the *Pinea Tapetzella Linn* and the *Tinea Biselliella Hummel.* In the larvæ and pupa stages, the three species are very similar, being scarcely distinguishable, and all laying minute pale yellowish ovoid eggs in the stuffs they attack. The chief differences occur in the moth state.

The commonest species in more northern latitudes is the case-bearing *Tinea Pellionella.* The moth is light brown with darker spots at intervals on the wings. Under ordinary conditions, they may be seen from May to August, but in houses where a uniform temperature is maintained they may be seen at any time during the year. They pair and then the female searches for suitable places to deposit her eggs, working her way into dark corners and hidden crevices, apparently choosing by instinct the least conspicuous places. The white soft bodied larvae hatch from these eggs and immediately proceed to make cases for themselves from the fragments of the cloth upon which they feed. These cases are cylindrical and are lined with silk. As they grow, they enlarge their cases by adding material to either end and by inserting gores down the sides which they split open for the purpose. When fully grown, they close up both ends of the case with silk and then lie torpid for some months. Finally they go through the pupa stage and again become moths.

The *Tinea Tapetzella* is distinguished from the other two by the fact that the front wings are black from the base to the middle and white to dark gray beyond. The larvae of this species forms for itself a silken gallery mixed with fragments of cloth and thus destroys much more material than it needs for food. It remains hidden within some part of this gallery and retreats to another portion when alarmed. It is transformed to the pupa stage without any other covering than the gallery affords. An interesting fact about this moth is that, in all probability, it is the specie mentioned by Pliny and referred to in the Bible.

CHAIR BACK INFESTED WITH MOTHS

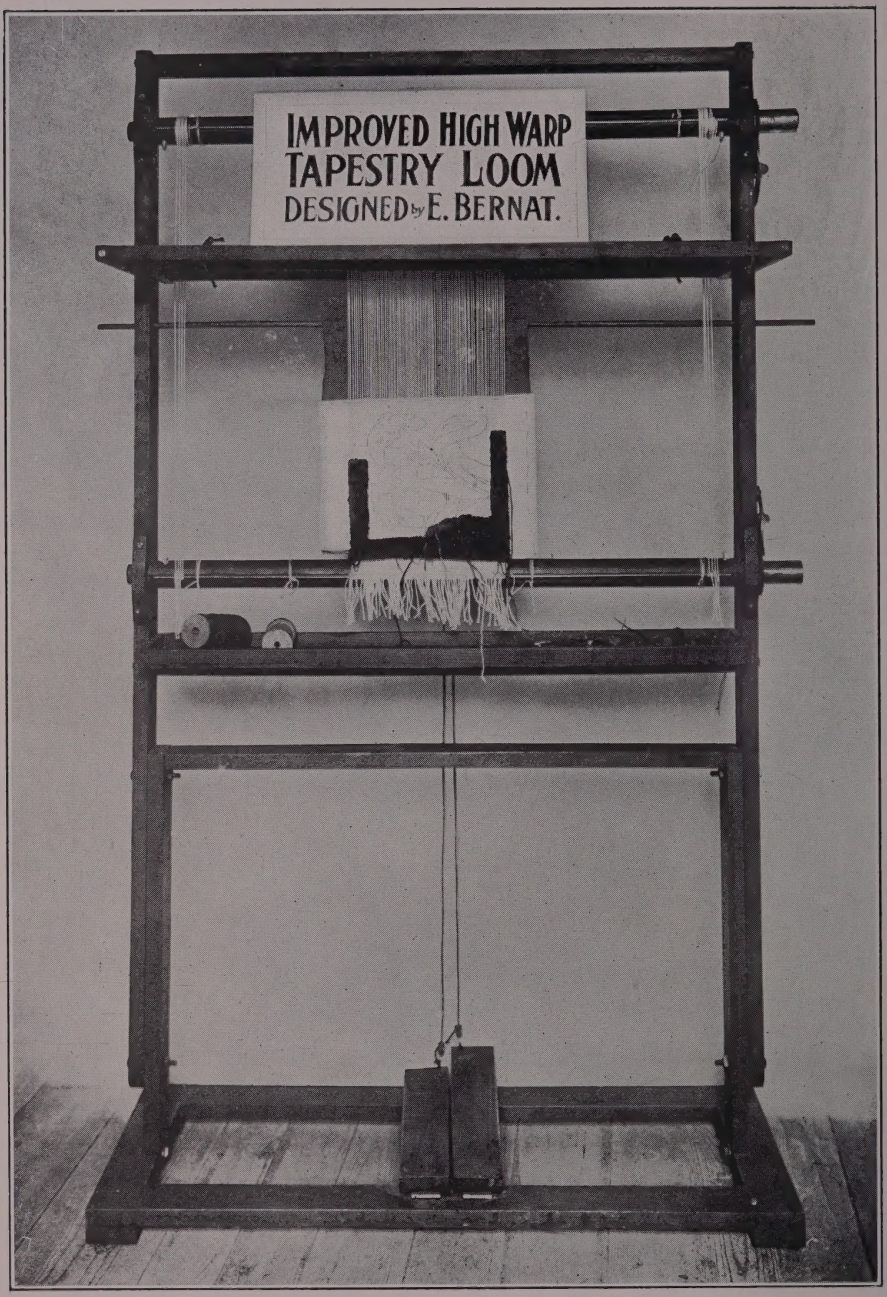


BACK OF RUG INFESTED WITH MOTHS

The *Tineola Biselliella,* which is most common south of Washington, is of a uniform delicate straw color. Its larvae make no case; but, when ready to transform, constructs a cocoon mainly from fragments upon which it has been feeding. It does, however, spin a certain amount of silk wherever it goes. This species is somewhat more prolific than the other two, having several generations a year. The food of all three types is practically the same; being wool, silk, fur, and all other animal fibres. In making their cases and cocoons they very often use cotton if that is available, probably because of its finer texture. Plenty of fresh air and light, as well as periodical attention, should be given objects liable to ravage by moths as they prefer damp air and darkness; and do not multiply and spread to such a great extent under the above conditions.

Many methods for exterminating these pests have been tried with greater or lesser success. Mr. Bernat, after years of experimenting, has developed a most effective means for killing them. His method not only kills the moths but also defertilizes the eggs so that they cannot hatch. Above all, in contrast to other means that are employed, it is absolutely harmless to fibres and colors.

Tapestry furniture is doubly liable to injury by moths, which are attracted by the hair used in the upholstering as well as by the covering To insure oneself against the loss of tapestries, tapestry-covered furniture, and other valuable textiles periodical examination by one who is familiar with moths in all their forms is as necessary as insurance against fire and burglary.


IMPROVED HIGH WARP
TAPESTRY LOOM
DESIGNED by E. BERNAT.

MR. EMILE BERNAT undertakes the RESTORATION and reproduction of tapestries, tapestry furniture, embroideries and needlework of all kinds; which are carried out under his personal supervision in his own workshops.

He makes a specialty of the treatment and protection of furniture and textiles against MOTHS.

EMILE BERNAT,

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